

frequently taken sick after leaving these unhealthy situations, or while detained by the before-mentioned causes, and, while thus sick, they ought and must be provided for. Masters of vessels will put them ashore regardless of consequences, either through fear of having their vessels quarantined at other ports, or to get rid of the expense of supporting them. There have been instances of from twelve to seventeen seamen being confined sick in one or two small rooms, afflicted with various distressing and contagious diseases; and during one season the collector was compelled to put a large number of sick seamen in a common boat-house, not being able to procure any other accommodation for them.

So strongly are the collectors of customs at our interior ports convinced that there should be some further provision made at this place for the accommodation of sick and disabled seamen, that a few years ago they all signed a petition to Congress to that effect.

Although the expense of taking care of the seamen at this point might be somewhat increased by the erection of an hospital *for a time*, yet your petitioners believe that it would *ultimately* be considerably diminished, and the hospital system be a saving to the United States, as seamen taken sick at the interior ports would be sent immediately to the marine hospital at Ocracoke, where, owing to the prevailing sea-breezes and the pure state of the atmosphere, they would recover their strength, when once convalescent, much more rapidly than at any of those ports. It has been stated (and the returns at the Department show it) that, in proportion to the number of sick seamen received at any of our hospitals along the coast, there have been fewer deaths at this port than any other. This circumstance is no doubt owing to its healthy situation, as bilious and other fevers, arising from miasmatic influence, are never known to *originate* there.

The petition sets forth in strong light the necessity and importance of the appropriation asked, and is numerously signed by persons whose respectability and good standing are said to be undoubted. In support of the statement of the petitioners, there is also on file, among the papers submitted to the committee, the following letter from the collector of Ocracoke to the Hon. William H. Washington, the Representative from that district, which, as it contains valuable information on the subject, is herewith submitted:

PORTSMOUTH, DISTRICT OF OCRACOCKE,

North Carolina, June 10, 1841.

DEAR SIR: I may be premature in addressing you at so early a period of the session of Congress, and at so short a time after your becoming our Representative; but the interest I have felt in the importance of having some better provision made for the relief of sick and disabled seamen in this district than at present provided for by law, is my apology. The importance of the matter, not only to your constituents, but to the commerce of all that part of our State passing out at this inlet, will at once, I believe, strike you forcibly, when you inquire into the subject. Separated as this district is, by water, a distance of from 70 to 150 miles from our interior ports, the great accumulation of vessels, consequently of seamen, so frequently at this point, detained to lighten over our swashes, by head wind and various other causes, it is evident there must often be many sick, particularly in the summer and fall, either attacked while up our fresh-water

rivers with bilious fever or ague and fever, which are so common to our climate, or receiving the seed of the disease while there, taken on their way down, or after arrival here. Masters of vessels, fearing to take them to sea lest they should be quarantined at their ports of destination, will land them here regardless of consequences; and the collector is of course under the necessity of making the best provision he can, which not only places him in a difficult situation, but even then the allowance is so small, at an expensive place like this, it is out of his power to procure them comfortable lodging, &c. I have, on one occasion, (having 17 sick seamen on my hands,) been compelled to fit up a common boat-house as well as I could, and put part of them in that—a situation not at all calculated for a person in the best health, much less to one laboring under severe bilious fever or some other dangerous disease. At another time I was under the necessity of procuring an old house built on a shell rock, two miles or more from any inhabitants, to accommodate several seamen thrown out here having small-pox: the inhabitants would not suffer them to be landed on either Ocracoke or Portsmouth island. Some years before I came here, a contract was made for several years with an individual to provide for sick and disabled seamen by the year—\$1,500 was allowed. This was abolished from some cause; since which time the collector has been instructed to allow the usual rates at our interior towns, that is, \$3 a week for board, 25 cents per day for attendance, not exceeding \$6 25 for any one seaman, if he remains 4 months, and apothecary rates for medicine. The houses here are generally very small, with but two rooms, and one story high, (with very few exceptions,) and not any ways calculated to accommodate sick persons; and when there are a number sick they must be (many of them) confined in one room, and then without proper bed-clothing, &c., or good nursing. Congress has been so well satisfied of the importance of building an hospital here, that, some few years ago, (I believe in 1834 or 1835,) the House of Representatives made an appropriation for this purpose, but it was not acted on, for want of time, in the Senate; since which, the Committee on Commerce has reported once, if no more, a bill to this effect: but nothing is yet done. I have not a doubt in my own mind if an hospital was erected, not a large and expensive one, but on a moderate scale, it would lessen the expenditures in this section of the State—I mean, including all the interior towns where commerce passes in and out of this inlet. Sick seamen, not only those taken sick in our roads, or brought here sick from other ports in vessels, but those taken sick in the interior commercial towns, would be sent here, and very anxious to get here; for it is a well-known fact that all seamen when sick prefer going to a regular hospital, where there is a skilful physician, good nurses, good clean beds and bedding, clean rooms, &c., to being placed in some small, cramped-up house in the outskirts of a town, or some dirty lane, where nothing is studied but to make as much, by depriving them of what is required, as possible. Besides this, the air is so pure here that seamen once on the recovery get up and are discharged immediately; whereas, in our fresh-water towns, if they have an attack of fever, so common to our climate in summer and fall, if they recover, they are a long time before they get their strength and are able to go to work. This will occur to you, no doubt. One reason, and the principal one, of my writing you so early is, that you may, if you should, on reflection and inquiry, be satisfied something should be done for the relief of

so valuable a class of citizens as seamen, more than is at present authorized by law in this district, lay it before the Committee on Commerce, or dispose of it in any other way you may deem best to bring about the end desired at an early day. My impression is the Hon. Mr. Stanly, as well as the Hon. Mr. Rayner, both, as well as yourself, Representatives from that portion of our State immediately interested in this object, will unite with you; for I can have no doubt they will, with yourself, see the importance of it. I do not recollect to have conversed with any merchant, mariner, or other person, on the subject of a marine hospital at this place, but who has been struck at once with its importance. It is not uncommon to see 30, 40, and frequently 50 or 75 sail of vessels lying in our roads at a time. Our State alone is not the only one interested in this matter, perhaps hardly as much as some of the Eastern States; for it is a well-known fact that more than half the exports of North Carolina are carried in Northern vessels by Northern seamen. I am satisfied more than one-half the seamen received into the temporary hospital here since I have been in office have been Northern seamen. I fear I shall tire you out with this long letter, but I have this object more at heart than any other.

Very respectfully, I am, sir, your obedient servant,

S. BROWN.

To the Hon. WM. H. WASHINGTON,

Member of Congress, Washington.

The reasons thus assigned for the necessity and propriety of the appropriation asked are satisfactory and conclusive to the minds of the committee, and they herewith report a bill.